



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

For the year ended December 31st, 1925.

Thetford Urban District Council.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to submit my Annual Report as follows:—

This being the end of the Quinquennial period the present Report contains a survey of the work done and changes which have taken place during that period and a full description of the routine work carried out in the District.

I. General Statistics.

The Area of the District is 7,096 acres, and is partly Urban and partly Rural. The population is estimated at 4,744 for 1925.

The number of houses has risen during the 5 year period from approximately 1,200 to 1,260, mainly due to the Newtown Housing Scheme which was completed in this period.

The penny rate has risen in consequence from £62 13s. 2d. to £72. The Rateable value of the District has risen from £14,997 to £17,401.

Of the Industries in the Town, two ceased to function during the period namely Brewing and Tanning, but the latter is being revived. The main work of the Town, namely Engineering, has passed through a very depressed time. On account of these facts unemployment has been severe in the Urban district. However during the last two years two new industries have sprung up, namely Forestry, and the growing of Sugar Beet, and the making of Sugar. Although these mainly affect the Rural part of district, they have absorbed a large amount of our surplus labour at times and helped the Town through a difficult time. The building of Sugar Factories in neighbouring places has also absorbed a part of our labour, although it meant that the men had to cycle many miles daily or else live away from home, and it says much for the men who did it that they stuck to their work so well. In addition to these sources of employment relief work on necessary schemes has been provided by the Council for the unemployed, and although the wages given were necessarily low, this helped to tide the Town over a very difficult time.

In spite of all these difficulties the general health of the Town has been good, and I can see no sign that the physical condition of the inhabitants has suffered to any extent.

II. Vital Statistics.

Birth Rate.

During 1925, 66 births were registered in the district, giving a birth-rate of 13.91 per 1000. Of the births, 34 were males and 32 females. 5 were illegitimate, 3 boys and 2 girls.

The fall in the birthrate during the 5 years has been very remarkable, and is a disquieting feature. Although it has only followed the rest of the country, it has been very severe in Thetford, having been as high as 22.26 per 1000 in 1922. Although this was quite an exceptional year, I think that the present year may also be taken as exceptional.

Death Rate.

52 deaths were recorded during the year, giving an annual death-rate of 10.96 per 1000. The principal causes of death were Heart disease 10, Cancer 8. There were 2 deaths from Diphtheria, 1 death from Pulmonary Tuberculosis, and 1 from Whooping Cough.

The death-rate over the 5 years has varied considerably, the maximum being 16.6 per 1000, and the minimum 8.4. No special cause of death has been operative in comparison with the rest of the country.

7 deaths in Infants under 1 year were registered, equivalent to an Infantile death-rate of 106 per 1000 deaths. This rate is higher this year, and is accounted for mainly by cases of premature birth. The rate over the last 5 years has been between 60 and 70.

111. Notifiable Diseases.

There was a sharp outbreak of Diphtheria in the Town in the spring, 9 cases occurred and were traceable to a carrier who had visited the Town from London. The disease was of a virulent type and 2 deaths occurred. In view of the dangerous nature of the disease, all bedding was burnt in addition to the usual precautions taken. The carrier was isolated until proved to be clear of infection.

2 cases of Scarlet Fever were notified. These were sporadic cases occurring in different parts of the Town, and with no connection with each other, and causing no spread of the disease.

1 case of Pneumonia was notified.

2 cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis were notified. 1 occurred in the Thetford Union, and the other was a sailor on leave who was found to be suffering from the disease, and was subsequently discharged and came to live in the Town.

No cases of Ophthalmia Neonatorum were notified.

Proforma as required for 1925.

General.

Disease	Total Cases Notified	Cases admitted to Hospital	Total Deaths
Diphtheria	9	Nil	2
Scarlet Fever	2	Nil	Nil
Pneumonia	1	1	Nil

Tuberculosis.

Age Periods	New Cases.				Deaths.			
	Pulmonary		Non Pulmonary		Pulmonary		Non Pulmonary	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	25—35	2	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	Nil

An outbreak of Mumps occurred in the spring of the year, and Chicken-pox and Whooping Cough were prevalent in the autumn and early winter.

During the five years period the District has had no serious outbreak of infectious disease, except that of Diphtheria in 1925. The occurrence of occasional cases of very mild Scarlet Fever throughout the period has been the only outstanding feature. The disease seemed to be of very low infectivity, as seldom was there more than one case in a house, and direct spread of the disease could not as a rule be traced from one case to another. The years 1921 and 22 were remarkably free of Infectious Disease, as one case of Scarlet Fever in each was the only notification of serious Infectious Disease.

Methods of prevention of Infectious Disease.

Diagnosis.

The Council provides for the examination of swabs in Diphtheria, the blood in Typhoid Fever, and the sputum in Pulmonary Tuberculosis free of charge in necessitous cases. This work was formerly carried out by the Clinical Research Association, but for the last two years it has been undertaken by the Norfolk County Laboratory in Norwich.

In suspected cases of Cerebro Spinal Fever, the Council authorises the calling in of a pathologist to confirm the diagnosis, and Dr. Claridge of Norwich has been appointed to do the work and his fees are paid by the Council in necessitous cases.

Prevention.

When a case of serious Infectious Disease is notified the house is visited by the M.O.H. and Sanitary Inspector. Enquiries are made to find if possible the source of the infection and deal with it. The accommodation and facilities for isolation in the house are inspected, and advice given as to how it may best be carried

out. Disinfectants are provided free. The Sanitary Inspector visits the house from time to time to see if the instructions are being carried out. The School Authorities are notified of the presence of disease in the house, and of the children whom it is necessary to exclude from School. On the conclusion of the case the room or rooms are disinfected with Formalin Vapour, and bedding where considered necessary is destroyed by fire, compensation being paid by the Local Authority. The School Authorities are notified that contacts may be re-admitted to School.

In cases of Diphtheria, Prophylactic inoculation of contacts is provided free in cases where such is considered necessary by the M.O.H. The doctor in attendance does the work and is paid at the rate of 5/- per case. Antitoxin is provided free of charge in necessitous cases. The Schick test has not been used. In cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis treated at home, sputum flasks are provided with disinfectant. Disinfection of rooms is carried out as required.

Treatment.

There is no general Infectious Hospital for the District. The Small-pox Hospital which was burned down during the war has not been rebuilt. Out of the buildings which remained a temporary Hospital of four beds has been improvised with the usual administrative offices.

In Diphtheria, Antitoxin is provided free of charge in necessitous cases by the Local Authority.

In Tuberculosis the District works under the County scheme. The patients are seen by the Tuberculosis officer in Norwich and the line of treatment mapped out.

(1) Sanatorium treatment or

(2) Treatment in the home, in which case a shelter is provided where suitable accommodation is available. Extra nourishment is provided. The case is treated by the local doctor, and examined periodically by the County Tuberculosis officer. Dental treatment is received where necessary. The scheme works well. Non-pulmonary Tuberculosis is treated in the Cottage Hospital or the Home.

Venereal Disease.

The District comes under the County Scheme, and patients can be seen at Norwich Hospital and receive treatment from the specialists there. The great difficulty is the expense to the patient of numerous journeys into Norwich for the treatment.

VI. Causes of Sickness.

No special causes of Sickness have been noted during the year.

V. Nursing arrangements. Hospitals and other Institutions available in the District.

1. Professional Nursing in the Home.

A District Nurse is appointed for the District. She attends all non-infectious diseases. She carries out her work under the supervision of a local Committee of ladies, who are responsible for raising a fund for her salary. This is done by subscription of 4/- a year for each family who desire her attendance, and by subscriptions from ladies and gentlemen in the Town.

In infectious cases where special nursing is considered necessary a nurse is provided by the Poor-Law Authority.

2. Midwives.

There are two practising midwives in the Town. No subsidy is provided for them.

3. Hospitals.

(a) Cottage Hospital. This is a general Hospital for all non-infectious diseases. It receives patients from the District and several of the villages round. A charge of 10/- a week is made to all non-subscribers, but really necessitous cases are admitted free. During the five years period this Hospital has been enlarged to provide more accommodation for the staff and an X-Ray Apparatus. The latter has proved a great asset to the Town, and has saved much suffering. The Hospital is supported by voluntary contributions. It contains seven beds and a cot.

(b) Poor-Law Infirmary.

In this institution an excellent maternity ward has recently been provided with a separate room for the actual confinement with proper appliances. It is likely to be a most useful addition to the Hospital when its facilities are better known.

(c) Smallpox Hospital.

As previously detailed this Hospital is supported by the Local Authority in conjunction with the Thetford Rural District Council.

4. Clinics and Treatment Centres. Maternity and Child Welfare Centre.

This Centre was opened on an entirely voluntary basis in August 1919. The Staff consisted of an Organiser, three Nurses, and a Secretary. The work was co-ordinated with the Scheme of the County Council and their forms were used as far as possible. Quarterly and Annual Reports were sent to the M.O.H. of the County. The work of the Centre gradually increased so extensively that it was decided to put the Centre on a proper grant-earning basis, and pay its officers a salary. This was taken in hand in 1924, and by April 1925, the new Scheme had been approved by the Ministry of Health, and has been working smoothly.

The main difference between the old and the new Scheme, lies in the fact that three villages; viz :- Croxton, Kilverstone and Barnham have been included in the Centre, which is now called the Thetford and District Maternity and Child Welfare Association. This change was necessary as the Town itself was not large enough to justify the appointment of a full time Nurse, and even now it is necessary to allow her to do ordinary maternity work, the fees for which are paid into the Centre funds. Nurse Sowels, The Rookery, Thetford, has been appointed to the post. The voluntary workers who previously gave their services have continued to do so, and our thanks are due to them for their great help. I would specially like to mention and thank Mr. J. G. Brown, Chairman, Mr. W. C. Fison, Treasurer, Mrs. Digby, Secretary of the Association, Miss A. H. Bidwell, Secretary of the Infant Welfare and Ante-Natal Clinics, and Mrs Carter, in charge of the clothing depôt. They have all done a great deal of work in connection with the movement.

Infant Welfare Centre.

This Centre has been open every second Wednesday at the Guildhall at 3 o'clock during the year, except during November and December, when it was closed on account of an outbreak of Whooping Cough, and again at the end of March on account of Measles. The recommendations of the Ministry's representative that a separate room for examinations should be provided, and that the babies should be fully undressed has been carried out as far as possible. Certain mothers have objected to the latter provision.

The Secretary's Report is as follows:—

Number of Children attending	...	...	...	...	...	91
„ „ Attendances made	..	...	...	...	...	370
„ „ Mothers attending	...	..	...	...	...	64
„ „ Sessions	...	...	...	...	...	21
„ „ Visits made by the Nurse to the homes	..	...	...	...	...	3351
„ „ Gallons of milk supplied	..	...	...	...	...	129

The Report this year covers the period April 1st to March 31st, instead of January to December as in former years. This is necessary for the preparation of the special Report required by the Ministry of Health.

At the Centre each child is seen by the Medical Officer of Health, and advice given to the mother on any condition that may be discovered in her child, and when occasion permits on the general welfare of the child. Milk and Medical necessities are provided free in suitable cases. This is a great help in carrying out the work.

Ante-Natal Clinic.

Under the new Scheme this work has received great help. Previously it was practically entirely carried out in the patients home as the mothers did not care to come to the ordinary Centre. The work is now carried on entirely apart from the Infant Clinic. A room has been secured at the Cottage Hospital, and the Clinic is open on the first Wednesday in each month at 8.15 p.m. The midwives in the Town have co-operated loyally in the work, and have endeavoured to persuade their patients to take advantage of the Clinic as much as possible. Our thanks are due to them for their effort in the work, as it is only by their co-operation that the Scheme can be successful. 26 mothers have attended during the six months that the Clinic has been open. Advice on the various conditions discovered is given, and help in carrying out the treatment when possible. Dental treatment is provided free of charge in necessitous cases. Records of each case are kept at the Centre. In addition 84 mothers have been visited in their homes by the Nurses, and 335 visits have been made. Morbid conditions developing after the confinement are attended to at the Clinic. This is likely to prove a valuable part of the work.

A very encouraging feature of this work has been the almost total abolishment of the handy woman as the attendant to the mother during the actual confinement. Of the 70 births 68 have been attended by trained Nurses.

Education.

Under this branch of the work, opportunity is given to the Nurses of attending Post-Graduate courses in connection with the Lying-in-Hospitals in London, so that they may keep up to-date in their work. All expenses are provided by the association. Our thanks are due to Miss Sowels for her donation to the funds of £60 for this work. During the year Nurse Carr attended the York Road Lying-in-Hospital, for their Post-Graduate week. Nurse Sowels attended the National Baby-week Conference. The Medical Officer attended the practice of the Infants Hospital, Vincent Square, for three weeks. I hope that Nurses will continue to avail themselves of the facilities provided.

Finance. A special appeal was made last year for subscriptions to carry on the work, and almost enough money was received to meet the expenses for the year. In future years the Ministry's grant will be available to help on the work, but the voluntary subscriptions will still be necessary if the Centre is to carry out its work. It is very encouraging that the Centre has been able to surmount the first difficult year without running seriously into debt.

5. Hospitals provided and subsidised by Local Authority.

Smallpox Hospital as above.

6. Provision for unmarried Mothers, illegitimate and Homeless Children.

Nil, except Poor-law Institution.

7. Ambulance Facilities.

Non Infectious Cases. A Motor Ambulance is stationed at Attleborough, which may be called in for this District. The patient pays the charges.

Infectious Cases. A Horse drawn Ambulance is provided for cases of Smallpox, otherwise nil.

VI. Laboratory Work.

This work was carried out in the past by the Clinical Research Association, but is now done by the Norfolk County Laboratory at Norwich, except the Chemical Examination of water which is done by Mr. Sutton, the County Analyst. The arrangements have been working smoothly. The Town Water is analysed each year. Over the five year period the report has been uniformly good and the Town is fortunate to possess an abundant supply of pure water. The supply is derived from a well sunk in the chalk on the high ground on the Mundford road. Previously the higher parts of the Town had poor pressure in the pipes at times of large consumption, but a new trunk main has been laid from the Reservoir to the centre of the Town, which has counteracted this difficulty and now the supply in these parts is good. The supply is constant. All houses in the Town are supplied with the Town Water, and a large majority have it in the home. The rest, mainly the older houses, use a stand pipe.

I give the Report on the Water for 1925, which is an average Report for the five years :—

Bacteriological Examination.

Quantities of Water 0.1c.c, 1c.c, 5c.c, 10c.c, 20c.c, 25.c.c. were sown into Lactose Bile Salt Litmus Peptone Solution.

Result :—No acid or gas in any tube after 48 hours incubation.

Number of organisms growing on Agar after 48 hours incubation at 37°C—Nil.

No Streptococi were found.

25.c.c. of water were sown into whole milk and after treatment in a water bath at 80°C for 15 minutes were incubated anaerobically for 2 days.

No reaction for *Bacillus Enteritidis* Sporogones was obtained.

Conclusion : The above Bacteriological results fail to show any evidence of contamination. Indeed it is a very pure Water.

Chemical Analysis in grains per gallon.

Saline Ammonia.	Albumenoid Ammonia.	Combined Chlorine.
Nil	·0007	1·1
Nitrogen as Nitrats.	Nitrats.	Total Solid Matter.
·5	Nil	21·0
Oxygen absorbed in 4 hours.	Hardness before boiling (total).	Hardness after boiling (permanent).
·0098	15·4°	3·7°

Opinion :—This Water is of exceptional organic purity and free from all trace of pollution. It is of excellent quality for drinking, and all purposes of a public supply.

In the Rural part of the area the water supply is drawn from surface wells in proximity to the houses.

VII. Sanitary Administration.**Drainage.**

Work was started at the end of the year on making a new drain to serve Magdalen St., and Melford Bridge Rd. It has now been completed. This is the only new drain laid during the five years. It was laid down under the scheme for the relief of unemployment.

The drainage of the Town is for the most part satisfactory as most of it is comparatively new. The effluent is discharged into the river, after passing through catch pits and tanks. All houses possessing water closets have cesspools.

Closet Accommodation.

There are three systems of conservancy in use in the Town, as follows :—Water closets 250 approximately, pail closets 440, privy vaults 500. The policy being pursued is to convert privy vaults to pail closets wherever this is possible, and advantage is taken whenever any privy vault becomes insanitary to take steps under the Housing Acts to compel the owner to convert. Under this scheme during the five years in review 13 have been converted to water closets, and 47 to pail closets. During last year 4 pail closets were converted to water closets, and 7 privy vaults to pail closets. I would point out that the present Staff are now fully employed, and if more conversions of privy to pail closets take place, further arrangements will have to be considered.

Scavenging.

With regard to sewage disposal, this work is carried out during the night by the Council Staff. The pails are cleared once a week, and the contents are disposed of on land in the occupation of the Council on the outskirts of the Town on a trenching system. There is a shed there with water laid on for the purpose of thoroughly washing the pails. The effluent from the washing is disposed of by irrigation on the land. The privy vaults and cesspools are emptied upon receipt by the Surveyor of notice requiring this to be done, and the excrement disposed of as in the case of the pails.

During the year 440 pails have been emptied weekly, 364 privy vaults and cesspools have been cleared. House refuse is removed each week by the employees of the Council and deposited in pits on the outskirts of the Town, and such as admits of it is destroyed by burning. The pit on the Bury Road will shortly be full and the one on Melford Common is filling up rapidly. It would be well if the Council began to consider the question of what will be done when both pits are full.

Sanitary Inspection of Area.

This work has been carried out regularly each year by routine inspections, and dealing with matters referred to the Sanitary Inspector by letter. The bakehouses have been inspected and found satisfactory. There are no underground bakehouses. There are five registered slaughter houses in the Town. They have been regularly inspected and found for the most part satisfactory. The regulations have been complied with. No seizures of tuberculous meat were made.

Tabular Statement for 1925 :—

Number of inspections made	...	...	...	...	...	...	216
„ „ nuisances discovered	...	...	...	...	...	...	21
„ „ informal notices served	...	...	...	...	...	...	21
„ „ statutory notices served	...	...	...	...	...	...	Nil
Result of notices	...	...	...	...	...	All complied with.	

Milk Supply.

Your Sanitary Inspector has during the last five years acted as a sub-inspector under the Norfolk County Council for the sampling of milk for sale. This arrangement terminated this year and in future the County

Council will send their own Inspector, but it will still be permissible for your own Inspector to take samples, and it is hoped that this will be carried out as it will mean an added safeguard to the milk supplies. Owing to the poor quality of the grazing round Thetford it is impossible to expect a very high standard of milk, but in spite of this I am pleased to report that the samples taken for the most part show a good quality of milk. During the five years only three prosecutions have been undertaken for adulteration, and several cautions have been given. During 1925, 25 samples were taken and submitted to the County Analyst, 8 were found not quite satisfactory. A caution was given to 4 vendors. A prosecution was considered necessary in 1 case as the milk was 28% deficient in milk fat. In addition 56 samples were tested by lactometer and generally found satisfactory.

Smoke Abatement.

No work has been carried out under this heading.

Schools.

The schools in the Town are in good Sanitary condition. They are supplied with water from the Town mains. A sprayer to spray disinfectant is used in the class rooms with a view to minimising infection. There have been epidemics of Mumps, Whooping Cough and Chicken-pox during the year, but no closure of classes was considered necessary. The schools are visited regularly by the school Medical Officer and Dentist. There is a local Care Committee who follow up the cases after his visit, to ensure that his recommendations are carried out. Fees are paid for the operation for Tonsils and Adenoids in necessitous cases by the County Council.

VIII. Public Health Officers.

Medical Officer of Health, part time D.P.H. Sanitary Inspector part time, Royal Sanitary Institute.

IX. Housing.

The question of the housing in the town has received close attention during the last five years. It was expected that the erection of 72 houses under the Council's Housing scheme in 1921-22 would go far to solve the difficulty, but unfortunately this hope has not been realised. These houses were erected at a time of high wages and prosperity in the Town, and now in this time of depression the people for whom they were intended cannot pay the rent namely 7/6 and 9/- plus rates. The scheme has however done much good in relieving overcrowding as there were many cases of young married couples living with their parents, and these houses provided a solution of their difficulty. It is a remarkable fact that although 72 new houses were provided in 1922, there is very seldom a house to let, and none stand empty. The class of house that is required in the Town now, to enable me to deal with the situation effectually, is one with 3 bedrooms and a sittingroom letting at 5/- a week, including rates, and I understand that this is not possible at present. Only one house has been built by private enterprise during the five years, and I am afraid you cannot look for help in the difficulty from that source. This shortage of the required house prevents real progress being made with dealing with defective property. Owing to the price of repairs it often would pay the owner to close his house rather than carry out the necessary work to make the house properly habitable, and as a result making the situation worse.

The carrying out of the work by the Council would, for the same reason, not be an economic proposition. Under these circumstances, it is necessary that every case must be carefully considered before a notice either informal or statutory is issued. The only method at present available to help the work of dealing with defective property is to utilise the Corporation Dwellings, and whenever one of these becomes vacant, to move a tenant from a defective house into it, and apply a closing order. This has already been done in several cases and the practice should be continued.

Overcrowding.

Overcrowding does not exist to any extent in the Town. Two or three cases only are known to exist of ordinary overcrowding, but there are a number of cases where families are growing up in two bedroomed houses, and the need of a third bedroom is necessary for the ordinary decencies of life.

Fitness of Houses.

The general standard of housing in the area is fair and in many cases good. The principal defects noted are dampness, due to chalk walls and the floor being below the level of the street, and defective lighting, due sometimes to narrow streets and sometimes to small windows. There are a number of houses which are generally dilapidated and practically require reconstruction. Some of the latter cases are due to the landlord with a bad tenant refusing to do anything until the tenant moves, and here the difficulty of providing a house for a known bad tenant comes up and is an ever present trouble. As a rule the internal condition of a house varies with the carefulness and providence of a tenant, and the landlord is usually ready to help a helpful tenant. The work of remedying the conditions is carried out as far as possible by modifying the demands on the landlord to the lowest figure which is consistent with health, and the Council has received support from the property-owners in the Town in this matter, as all notices have been complied with in 1925.

New Houses erected	..	...	...	...	...	...	...	Nil
Houses inspected under Public Health Acts	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	106
Number of Houses found totally unfit for human habitation	...	..						3
"	"	"	"	not in all respects unfit for human habitation	..			11
"	"	"	"	in respect of which notices were served requiring repairs				11
"	"	"	"	rendered fit after service of notices	(a)	By Owners		11
					(b)	Local Authority		Nil
"	"	"	"	in respect of which closing orders became operative	...			3

In one of these cases the owner made such alterations and repairs as to make the house fit for human habitation, and the order was withdrawn.

There were no demolition orders.

Inspection and Supervision of Food.

As detailed under para. VII.

The Inspections are carried out by the Sanitary Inspector at the slaughter houses and in the shops. No prosecutions have been found necessary.

I would again like to record my appreciation of the work done by the Sanitary Inspector and my thanks to him for his help.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

ARCHD. OLIVER, M.D., D.P.H.

Medical Officer of Health.

Thetford,

May 13th, 1926.